

THE ORIGINAL WHITE WINGS.

Gulls Merit Protection As Scavengers on Sea Coast--
Many Render Important Inland Services to Agriculture.

Washington, D. C., The term "gull" usually is associated in the popular mind only with the long-winged swimmers seen along the salt water shores and in coast harbors. There are represented in the United States, however, twenty-two species or subspecies of gulls, including the gull-like birds known as skuas and jaegers. Of these some are true inland birds, frequenting prairies, marshes, and inland lakes. Flocks of gulls on the waters of our harbors or following the wake of vessels are a familiar sight but not every observer of the graceful motions of the bird is aware of the fact that gulls are the original "white wings".

As sea scavengers they welcome as food dead fish, garbage, and offal of various sorts, and their services in cleaning up such material are not to be regarded lightly. It will, however, surprise many to learn that some of the gull family render important inland service, especially to agriculture. At least one species, the California gull, is extremely fond of field mice, and during an outbreak of that pest in Nevada in 1907--8 hundreds of gulls assembled in and near the devastated alfalfa fields and fed entirely on mice, thus lending the farmers material aid in their warfare against the pestiferous little rodents. The skua also feeds on mice and lemmings. Several species of gulls render valuable service to agriculture by destroying insects also, and in spring hundreds of Franklin's gulls in Wisconsin and the Dakotas follow the plowman to pick up the insect larvae uncovered by the share.

That at least one community has not been unmindful of the substantial debt it owes the gull is attested in Salt Lake City, where stands a monument surmounted by a bronze figure of two gulls, erected by the people of that city "in grateful remembrance" of the signal service rendered by these birds at a critical time in the history of the community. For three consecutive years--1848, 1849, and 1850--black crickets by millions threatened to ruin the crops upon which depended the very lives of the settlers. Large flocks of gulls came to the rescue and devoured vast numbers of the destructive insects, until the fields were entirely freed from them.

It is no wonder that the sentiment of the people of Utah as reflected through their laws affords gulls the fullest protection.

BIRD RESERVATIONS.

Of the 68 bird reservations, some 27 situated on the seacoast or on islands in the Great Lakes are visited by the gulls in migration and frequented by them during the breeding season. In these reservations the birds find safety from human molestation and local wardens have endeavored to reduce their wild native enemies to a minimum.

Among the birds frequenting these reservations are the glaucous-winged, western, herring, California, and laughing gulls. Thus these reservations protect several of the most important species of North American gulls.

Through the efforts of individuals and the National Association of Audubon Societies, guards and wardens have been employed along the coasts until it is probable that there is no important colony from Maine to Florida not guarded during the breeding season. A few colonies are protected on the Gulf coast, and on the Oregon coast breeding-places are guarded by State wardens. As a result of this protection herring gulls along the coast of Maine have increased considerably, while laughing gulls are beginning to be common once more in various localities where they had been almost exterminated.

LEGAL PROTECTION.

Fully as important for the protection and increase of gulls has been the enactment of State laws prohibiting their killing at any time of year and of laws prohibiting the sale of their plumage. Gulls, with their close allies, the terns, have been among the greatest sufferers from the millinery trade. As is usually the case, the birds were shot on the breeding grounds during the height of the nesting season, thus causing the death not only of the parent birds, but insuring the death of the young birds by lingering starvation. Some years ago the public awoke to the barbarity of such slaughter, and after much agitation New Jersey, in 1885, enacted the first effective State law prohibiting the killing of gulls. This example has been followed by other States until now--1915--there are 40 States which protect gulls all the year. Louisiana protects them during the breeding season, February 1, to August 1, while five States--Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico--offer them no protection at any time of year.

The surest way to protect any given bird is to remove the temptation to destroy it, and so the most certain way to stop the killing of gulls for the millinery trade is to prohibit the sale of gulls' wings and plumage, so that the plume hunter can find no market for his spoils. To California belongs the credit of incorporating in the game law of 1895 the first law in this country prohibiting the sale of gulls' plumage for millinery purposes. Many States followed this lead until, in 1910, New York, enacted the most drastic law of all, prohibited not only the sale but the having in possession of the plumage of any bird belonging to the same family as any of the birds of the State of New York.